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Emiliano Zapata and the Class of Revolutionaries

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In 1910 the long reign of Porfirio Diaz was challenged, and came to an end. In the vacuum left by the oppressive leader there was not one single man to fill the void. The revolution held many leading roles from across the nation that represented the many fractured aspects of Mexican culture that had suffered under Diaz. Many actors took part in this theater of continuous civil war, such as Victoriano Huerta, Francisco Madero, Pascual Orozco, Venustiano Carranza, and Alvaro Obregon. However, in amongst the turmoil the Emiliano Zapata stands alone as one who stayed the same course throughout it all, and his alliances with Francisco Madero and Pancho Villa in particular show the changing character of Emiliano Zapata, and the ever-changing tides of the revolution. All had their following, and all experienced some success at certain points and to certain degrees. They represented different parts of Mexican society and different geographical regions in the diverse nation. Some could not be counted among the survivors when Mexico reached a state of solidarity again in 1924.[1] Among those was Emiliano Zapata. Assassinated by Carranza's forces in 1919, Zapata could not live to experience victory. However, among this class of revolutionaries Zapata represented a desire that the others did not. And, it was Zapata that, in name and legacy, grew to be the most successful of the group.

Born in the rural state of Morelos Zapata grew up with the labor of the farm and animals, and the peasant class of Mexico as the dominant influences in his life. Coming from

[1]Peter Calvert, "The Mexican Revolution: Theory or Fact?" *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 1969, 54.

a locally honored family, Emiliano grew into a natural leadership role in local politics with the exception of a very brief draft into the Army and work in stables in Mexico City. Upon returning to his home Zapata resumed local leadership, and thus held an early role in the disturbances that would eventually lead to the civil war. The drum beat of imminent revolution started with Porfifio Diaz's own words. John Womack tells us of Diaz speaking casually to a reporter casually of his retirement and succession, "... he was definitely retiring when his term ended in 1910 and would not, even if his 'friends' begged him, 'serve again.'"[2] The statement was followed by the death of Morelos' long term governor, and another Diaz misstep in trying to refill the role. When Diaz chose a culturally and politically unfit replacement for the Governorship of Morelos the people bristled with unrest. The situation gave rise to minor clashes, and most of them political, but it also provided opportunity for the poor to move against the owners of the massive hacienda estates in the area. Zapata himself led a small band of farmers to claim land from a hacienda in the area of his local village. At first meeting resistance from the owner and guards, the peasants were eventually allowed to reside on the land. When the owner demanded reparations the following year the now incumbent farmers refused, and even received legal backing.[3]

The local scuffles continued to increase the prominence of Zapata as a local leader. The noise surrounding his name, however, reached beyond the peasants and landed of Morelos, and Zapata began to gain a more national reputation that was solidified with the Plan de Ayala, a manifesto that called for specific land reforms to take place.[4]Zapata's reputation became crystallized when Francisco Madero, a man from a very well-known

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[2] John Womack Jr, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution.* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc. and Random House Inc, 1968,) 28.
[3]Ibid, 38-46.
[4] Ibid, Appendix B, 411-412

family, began touting a campaign to change the government of Diaz from Northern Mexico. What began as a campaign became civil strife, and Madero found himself at military odds with the capital. The conflict came to blows in late 1910, and the upstart leader gained a striking first victory. The victory highlighted the differences between the government of Mexico and its people, and Zapata's leadership gained national attention. Madero's campaign faltered shortly afterwards, and this actually highlighted Zapata's name even more. The country was looking at leadership alternatives to the Diaz government, and Zapata stood as an early peer to Madero. [5]

Madero was quick on his political feet, however, and not only bounced back in the military efforts against Diaz, but also moved to gain Zapata as an ally and subordinate. Meeting together, the two new leaders in Mexico, along with others, hashed out the San Juan plan. This document explicitly stated the goals of Madero's reform movement, and incorporated the land reform desired by Zapata. Following the meeting was more skirmishes, but with two fronts the tides had rapidly turned against Diaz. As well, with the death of Madero's general in the South, Zapata was named chief of rebel forces for Southern Mexico. [6]

In 1911 Diaz was ousted from Mexico, and Madero assumed interim leadership, that eventually resulted in the presidency of Francisco de la Berra. The end of conflict proved to be more of an uneasy pause, however. The varied leaders from the rebel movement now settled into different roles and expectations for the new future of Mexico. Zapata suddenly found himself very outside of the loop. Madero, along with de la Berra and the general

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[5] Kirkwood Burton, *The History of Mexico*. Westport, (CT: Greenwood Press, 2000),132-140.
[6] John Womack Jr, 95-102.

Huerta had been part of upper society prior to the conflict, and had desired more personal control and reform than complete revolution of Mexican government and society. Madero, though personally tied with Zapata, began to change the language from the revolutionary ire to conciliatory in relation to old institutions. Some officials from Diaz' government were even allowed to return to their posts. The worst for Zapata was the lack of action for land reform. The one item he and his soldiers had fought for laid unaddressed on the San Juan pact only. Madero played off his personal requests that this issue be resolved.

Not only did Zapata feel to now be outside the leadership he had participated in as a combatant, but the other leaders were quite suspicious and distrustful of his army and his popularity. Playing off of Madero's lax efforts towards land reform, they began to emphasize the danger of the ruffian to the South. De la Berra commanded Zapata lay down arms and resign any official position. Zapata, loyal to his past comrades, and especially to Madero, conceded, but negotiated for certain rewards for his men and a low position for himself. For a moment, Zapata nearly retired from the national scene and any future conflicts.[7]

The dual realities of the unsatisfied rural population of Morelos and the suspicious leaders of the new government would ensure his return. While Zapata was willing to remain loyal to Madero in his actions by relinquishing the fight and trusting the new government, the population of Morelos was much less obliged to do so having shed blood for their cause that was now being continuously kicked back in priority. Their unrest grew to small instances of confrontation with authorities. Combined with larger actions of revolt

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[7] Ibid, 15-130.

in other parts of Mexico, these confrontations only confirmed the ideas of de la Berra who threatened federal action in order to pacify uprisings. Zapata responded by actually taking up arms in order to aide in the control of the government. The action of re-arming of his rebel forces were taken as an instance by Berra to have Zapata removed from the national picture. Berra deployed Huerta to demand Zapata relinquish arms, but the sly and ambitious General moved beyond steps of caution with his forces and positioned on the outside of Zapata's town – an act connived in order to prod Zapata into violent response.[8]

Zapata, shocked at the effrontery, sent words of concern and dismay to Madero. Madero, however, failed to respond directly and instead put out a public statement renouncing the land reform of the San Juan pact. The betrayal, along with the aggressive acts of Huerta, galvanized Zapata into action. A new revolution was declared with the Plan de Ayala. Zapata had officially broken with Madero, and moved for another new government in order to fully enact the long desired land reform. Madero lost more allies than just Zapata, however. Following the struggles with the south, Madero abandoned further social reforms that had been supported by Pascual Orozco. With his revolutionary support fractured, Huerta executed a swift coup in Mexico City and executed Madero shortly afterwards. The class of revolutionaries splintered into loose sides from the point of Huerta's assumption of power. Orozco aligned behind Victoriano Huerta, becoming a general for the new government. Zapata, meanwhile, joined with Pancho Villa and newcomer Alvaro Obregon to support Carranza.[9]

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, 207.

Villa and Zapata held a respectful, if cautious relationship. Villa, seemingly, simply wanted to pursue the revolution without definite goals. Zapata on the other hand not only had the very specific goal of land reform, but refused to compromise on a new government until these measures were acted out by the government. Additionally, Zapata was wary of new allies after the drawn out saga with Madero. Although they eventually joined forces against Huerta, Zapata did not enter into any official integration with the forces of Pancho Villa.[10]

Pancho Villa played an active an interesting role throughout the revolution. At the time, he carried the most popular image of Mexican leaders outside of Mexico, particularly with the United States. A bandit of great charisma, Villa hailed from the state of Durango and commanded a popular following. The attraction led to an active presence of journalists from the United States around Villa's camps and campaigns. His popularity even reached such great heights that political cartoonists depicted Villa in newspapers, and President Woodrow Wilson maintained a decent probability that Pancho Villa would eventually assume the presidency of Mexico.[11] It reached such an extent that the United States even intervened in the Mexican Civil War by seizing Veracruz. Nancy Benton tells us, "This decision signaled a greater interest [by the U.S.] in Villa as a person."[12]The U.S. intervention, along with the multiple-front war with other Mexican leaders finally forced Huerta to give up the Presidency and flee the country. With Heurta in exile Carranza assumed Presidency. His residence was short and uneasy, however. The alliance amongst Carranza, Villa, and Zapata had been tenuous with a common enemy. Now that Heurta was

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Brandt, Nancy. "Pancho Villa: The Making of a Modern Legend." *The Americas*, 21, no. 2, 1964, 156.
[12] Ibid, 149.

out of the picture Carranza wanted to reduce the threat of the two other armies residing in the Mexican countryside. Under pressure from the United States government Carranza pursued negotiations instead of arms with the camps of Villa and Zapata.

With Zapata, however, negotiations stalled. Undoubtedly suspicious of Carranza for both his social standing (a man who was socially at odds with the rural world of Zapatistas) and their past with Huerta and Madero, Zapata refuted the Carranza leadership's efforts at conciliation. The leader of Morelos was not the only spurned and dissatisfied leader in the country. Once again rebellious leaders, including Obregon and the seasoned fighter Angeles, were unimpressed with their new president, and they convened the Convention Aguascalientes. After some stalling by the Zapatista party, a new declaration was arranged and a military coalition of Villa and Zapata now moved against the fledgling Carranza government. Both the victory over Carranza and the coalition were ended quickly. Shortly after his deposition, the relations between Villa and Zapata suffered, and Zapata retreated back to Morelos where he awaited quietly. Meanwhile, Obregon, ensconced in Mexico City moved to eliminate the military might of Pancho Villa and consolidate his own power. For the fourth time since the initial campaign against Diaz, Mexico flared into violence between the new leader and the remaining revolutionaries. [13]

Zapata would survive the revolution long enough to see Carranza return to the Presidency three years later and several shifts in tactical and military strength. Reduced to small-time guerilla and forced from his strongholds in Morelos, Zapata would return to semi-prominence. Despite the severe loyalty of the rural people to his message of reform,

[13] Jeremy Womack Jr, 278.

Zapata would not survive to see Carranza removed a second time. In 1919 Zapata was lured into negotiations by the pretenses of federal officers wishing to defect, was ambushed, and assassinated.[14]

Zapata, however, far and above his contemporaries of the revolution would live on in the culture of Mexico to a much greater extent. While Villa became a folk legend, and Madero was remembered as a martyr of the revolution, Zapata's unwavering loyalty to land reform and the rural people who needed it developed into a national phenomenon. His land reforms were exercised moderately by the succeeding government of the revolution, but it wasn't the federal government that kept the name and idea of Zapatista alive. With little of the demands that they had shed so much blood for, it was the people of rural Mexico that continued on in honoring and calling for what they and Zapata had fought for. Following the establishment of normal government operation in 1924 annual celebrations began to be held by local government to honor the 'Martyr of Chinameca'.[15]

These continued, expanding from one province to another. By 1950 the celebration had not only reached a national prominence, but became a staple talking point for Federal officials to recognize in front of the people of Mexico. Federal programs were instituted to display the revolutionary leader in a positive, if not nearly deistic light.[16] By 1968 Zapata had reached the status of a transcendent idea, and became identified in locations he had not been strong in (or even a part of) during the revolution. College students rallied around his image when demonstrating for their own modern struggles. By the 21st Century

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[14] Samuel Brunk, "Remembering Emiliano Zapata: Three Moments in the Posthumous Career of the Martyr of Chinameca." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 1998, 458.
[15] Ibid, 463-469.
[16] Dennis Gilbert, "Emiliano Zapata: Textbook Hero." *Mexican Studies*, 2003. 143-145.

Emiliano Zapata's family attended these national observances alongside federal officials almost as celebrities of the fallen revolutionary.[17]

The class of revolutionaries was a varied and fractured group. Encompassing old regimes and radical reformations, it was carried by both the higher social classes, and the lowest. A decade of Presidents cycling in and out of the position in a swirl of violence dominated the nation, and attracted the attention of foreign powers. None, however, remained as tried and true to their original goal as Zapata. His peers did, in their own way, show his character better than he often represented on his own. His long-standing loyalty to Madero and his eventual break with the leader is reflected with the terse and fragile alliance held between Zapata and Pancho Villa later in the war. The rural-born horse wrangler and stable boy became a leader that was sought, feared, betrayed and immortalized. He was not one of the few to survive the turbulent period, but his name lives on in much greater capacity than any other from that time.

[17] Ibid, 478-481.

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Topic Proposal

Emiliano Zapata and the class of Revolitionaries

Porfirio Diaz essentially ruled Mexico for decades. His rule saw the industrialization of Mexico, but also the enactment of extremely oppressive measures to control the government and the citizens of Mexico. When Diaz was displaced in 1911 the succession did not easily fall to one shining star. Although the general Huerta nominally held the Presidency, the country was divided amongst a host of revolutionaries and among them was Emiliano Zapata. A peasant from Southern Mexico, Zapata led an agenda that sought economic reforms with specific focus on agrarian life.

Zapata was not the only one, however, to lead a revolutionary militia in an effort to change Mexico. Zapata stood as one in a roster of Revolutionary leaders. Pancho Villa, Huerta, and other guys vied for the leadership of Mexico. They fought, allied, betrayed, and re-aligned in various attempts to gain control. This continued until control was seized, the leaders of the revolution were assassinated and Plutarco assumed power.

So my paper is going to be focusing on Emiliano Zapata and his role in the revolution and as a peer among the leaders in the revolution. I will be paying attention to his interactions with the other leaders and his eventual assassination

with special focus given to his desired changes to society. Finally, the paper will try and examine the lasting legacy of Zapata in the political climate of Mexico after the revolution, and in the lasting significance of Zapata himself in Mexican culture.

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